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The Atlantic Bridge: Diagnosis and Prognosis

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National Intelligence Council Memorandum

Volume I: Key Judgments and Summary

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NIC M 83-10002
January 1983

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The Atlantic Bridge: Diagnosis and Prognosis

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National Intelligence Council
Memorandum

Volume I: Key Judgments and Summary

Information available as of 20 January 1983
has been used in the preparation of this Memorandum.

This Memorandum was prepared by Ambassador Lincoln Gordon, National Intelligence Officer at Large, and the National Intelligence Council Analytic Group. It has benefited from extensive joint review by representatives of the national Intelligence Community, notably the Departments of State and Defense and the Directorate of Intelligence. It is published on the responsibility of the National Intelligence Council.

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The Atlantic Bridge: Diagnosis and Prognosis

Key Judgments

The Atlantic Condition in Brief

As compared with past Atlantic disputes, current US-European [1] differences are more numerous, more subtle, and more interrelated. Most important, they tend to separate the United States from Europe as a whole.

Nevertheless, the mutual recognition of shared values and security and economic interdependence remains strong. Most Europeans continue to regard NATO as the core of their security. Thus, their fundamental preference is to preserve or even strengthen the Atlantic Bridge by joining in a common effort to:

- Overcome substantive differences on key matters of common concern, especially on security strategy and policy toward the Soviets under new conditions.
- Improve the methods of Atlantic cooperation.

Without adequate attention to the cumulative effect of differences and tensions, there is real danger of breakdown:

- Breakdown could result either from gradual estrangement or from a crisis involving a fundamental issue.
- In either case, breakdown could involve the growth of antagonistic economic practices, the pursuit of parochial and conflicting policies in extra-European areas, intensified divergences in posture toward the USSR and on defense strategy within Europe, the reduction of NATO to an empty shell, or even the withdrawal of US troops from Europe and the dissolution of NATO. A major and dangerous step in this direction would be the shift of Germany from its Western security alignment to a position of neutrality.

For its part, the US stake in close Atlantic cooperation has increased as a result of greater Soviet military power, revived European economic strength, and lessened US influence on world affairs in general.

[1] The terms "European" and "Europe" are used in this Memorandum to refer to Western Europe unless otherwise noted. In the security context, Western Europe comprises European members of NATO; in economic matters, it also includes the non-NATO European members of the OECD. Except where noted, the focus of the Memorandum is on US relations with the major European powers—West Germany, Britain, France, and Italy.

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Transatlantic tensions among governments cover the gamut of political, security, and economic interests. The most important single factor underlying them is the Soviet advance to strategic parity and to nuclear and conventional superiority in Europe, which has lessened the credibility of US defense guarantees to Europe and created severe Atlantic differences over how best to respond to these historic changes.

These tensions notwithstanding, European governments realize that the US presence is indispensable to their security and that close relations with the United States are a prerequisite for realizing many of their political and economic objectives. For these reasons, they have sought to keep within bounds specific policy differences with Washington, and they continue to search for mutually acceptable positions on critical issues except where they believe that US policy clearly contradicts their national interests.

Among publics, even though NATO as a symbol retains strong support, there are also disturbing trends on both sides:

- Many Europeans, especially in the postwar generations, have lost confidence in US security policies and are fearful of American bellicosity and unsteadiness (as they perceive it); some, especially on the left, favor a neutralist stance of equidistance from both superpowers, believing that US policies endanger European security.

- Many Americans [2] have lost confidence in the European will to resist Soviet political encroachments or even outright aggression; some resent European efforts to take "free rides" at American expense (as they perceive it).

Current Atlantic differences result in part from long-term changes in addition to the increase in Soviet military might, such as the growth in European economic strength and political self-confidence, the emergence of major new economic power centers outside the Atlantic region, and the effects of the European Common Market and expanding European political cooperation. The making of security policies has become complicated by the growing involvement of general publics and the loosening of political consensus. Europe's younger generations, lacking direct memories of World War II, postwar recovery, or the Cold War, tend to be less sympathetic to US policies. In addition, unstable conditions in regions outside of Western Europe have produced acute new problems—especially

[2] Observations in this Memorandum on American attitudes are based on publicly available Gallup, Roper, and Harris poll data and are used only for purposes of comparison.

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in Southwest Asia—which the United States is trying to confront but toward which there is no Atlantic consensus and only very modest help from the Europeans.

Soviet Policy Toward Western Europe

For two decades, Moscow has sought to divide Western Europe from the United States through a combination of diplomatic sticks and carrots, overt propaganda, and covert active measures, taking full advantage of the variety of tensions within the Atlantic Alliance. Soviet military power has served as an implicit instrument of intimidation even while Moscow downplayed the threatening aspects of its military might. Trade opportunities have been manipulated to provide special attractions to depressed segments of European industry and to foment transatlantic dissension. More broadly, the Soviets have promoted the concept that detente can be viable in Europe without being affected by disputes between the superpowers.

The Soviets are currently pursuing the goal of splitting the Western Alliance with special intensity in West Germany, hoping to defeat the right and center in the March elections, undermine prospects for NATO nuclear modernization, and secure one-sided advantages in the various East-West arms control discussions. They and their supporters in Western Europe have skillfully exploited European fears of nuclear war, embraced and assisted the European peace movements, and persuaded many Europeans that responsibility for a continuing arms race lies entirely in Washington.

Issues in Contention

The principal Atlantic security problem is how to defend Western Europe in a period of strategic nuclear parity and Warsaw Pact nuclear and conventional superiority in Europe. US-European differences over security issues have been exacerbated by divergent perceptions concerning the meaning and value of East-West detente. There has been spreading *public* resistance in Europe to NATO reliance on nuclear weapons, accompanied by growing *governmental* appreciation that virtually every conceivable security alternative involves substantial costs or risks. Both governments and publics believe that:

- Significant strengthening of conventional defenses would be very difficult in a time of economic stringency. Even if it could be achieved, the need for credible nuclear deterrence would remain.

- Strengthening the US nuclear deterrent to the point of restoring clear-cut Western superiority is not a realistic prospect.

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- An independent European nuclear deterrent or conventional defense without US participation would require a degree of unity that is not possible for the foreseeable future.

The Europeans have conflicting and contradictory concerns:

- Fear that the US nuclear deterrent will be decoupled from the defense of Europe, leaving Europe vulnerable to Soviet intimidation; hence the desire for US military capability in Europe at every potential level of escalation, but with most allies strongly preferring to restore a balance of forces through arms control.

- Fear of devastation from nuclear exchanges in Europe, leading to a desire to raise the nuclear threshold without further undermining NATO's nuclear deterrent.

- Fear of conventional war, intensified by efforts to strengthen NATO's conventional forces as a means of raising the nuclear threshold.

No single satisfactory resolution of this multiple dilemma is possible. The direction of movement with the greatest prospect for alleviating both public and governmental concerns is toward tactical and technological improvements in conventional defense designed to lessen the conventional imbalance in Europe and delay the need to resort to nuclear weapons. This shift would not be intended to alter the basic strategy of forward defense, flexible response, and maintenance of the nuclear first use option as an indispensable element in overall deterrence. A much greater emphasis on conventional defense capability, however, would be difficult to undertake in the near future due to economic constraints and concerns of allied governments that it would undercut the nuclear deterrent. Moreover, a new debate about strategy might further weaken European public confidence in the US nuclear guarantee.

For most Europeans, *arms control* is both a component of security strategy and part of the political search for a stable relationship with the Soviets. The onset of the INF negotiations and START was welcomed in Europe, but a continued lack of agreement would revive European charges of US indifference to arms control.

The ability of NATO to carry out its 1979 INF decision has become the most immediate test of Alliance cohesion and European reliability:

- Regardless of its military rationale, INF has assumed an independent political life.

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- The USSR and its sympathizers in Western Europe are playing on European anxieties to influence the INF debate, which is a major test of Moscow's effort to undermine US influence in Europe.

- Overall, prospects for deployment depend on the extent to which European governments, especially the German Government that results from the March elections, consider INF worth accepting some risk of political defeat or civil disorder and on their judgment of whether the United States is to blame for lack of progress in Geneva.[3]

- Several European governments are under great pressure to reverse their commitments to INF modernization—pressure arising not only from the peace movement and extreme leftists but, more importantly, from moderate elements in social democratic and other parties whose support is often critical on a broad range of political issues.

Nevertheless, INF deployment plans remain basically on track; Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and perhaps Belgium are still likely to proceed, although chances are growing that the decision may unravel. Prospects in the Netherlands remain poor.

Differences over security, including burdensharing disputes of growing intensity, have led to some suggestions on both sides of the Atlantic that *Europe take greater responsibility*—perhaps even complete responsibility—for its own security on the ground that it is "unnatural" for prosperous, populous, and skilled nations to depend on "outsiders." However:

- The "unnaturalness" flows in part from other—and equally "unnatural"—conditions, especially Germany's division and Bonn's renunciation of nuclear weapons.

- "Europe" will remain a collection of independent states. Even if greater unity were possible, an independent European defense without US participation would inevitably be dominated by Germany—an arrangement unacceptable to the other European countries.

- The most likely alternatives to active American participation in the defense of Europe would be either (a) a West Germany not capable of defending itself and increasingly "neutral" in orientation or (b) German acquisition of an independent nuclear capability—either of which would seriously imperil US interests because it would leave Europe vulnerable and politically fragmented.

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The problem of increasing the security of *Southwest Asia,* as well as other lesser differences over the Third World, adds further frictions to Atlantic relations. Despite our allies' acknowledgement of a common interest in the region, especially the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, they are reluctant to undertake major new commitments, either directly or to compensate for US forces earmarked for Europe which might be transferred to Southwest Asia in a crisis.

Economic difficulties also strain Atlantic relations:

- Slow economic growth, coupled with increasing international competition in key industries, has intensified protectionist pressures.

- Longstanding agricultural disputes are being further aggravated by growing EC surpluses and heightened competition for export markets.

- Differences over East-West trade, credit policies, and technological transfers will probably recur.

- The relative importance of transatlantic economic differences will be magnified by the double-digit rates of unemployment in Western Europe that will continue at least for the near term.

Some of the economic stresses reflect enduring differences of interest, but need not impair basic Atlantic relations unless they become so cumulative that they undermine trust in key international economic institutions or unless economic cooperation becomes poisoned by political and security quarrels. Amelioration of these stresses depends on the revival of the world economy and on Europe's ability to adapt its industrial structure to new technologies and a changing international environment. European governments are beginning to address some of the factors contributing to the region's relative lack of competitiveness, such as excessive welfare costs and inflationary wage increases.

The Atlantic relationship will continue to be burdened by contradictions in attitudes of many Europeans toward the United States and the Soviet Union:

- They will view Soviet military power as the chief threat to their autonomy, yet will try to avoid direct involvement in superpower quarrels, even where their interests are clearly at stake as in Southwest Asia.

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- They will fear US-Soviet condominium when Moscow and Washington negotiate, yet will be concerned about heightened tension in the absence of such negotiations.

- They will resist any strategic notion that war might be limited to their region, yet recognize that American interest in Europe is partly conditioned by Europe's serving as a first line of defense for the United States.

- They will urge the United States to conclude arms control agreements, even at the risk of a continued military imbalance in Europe.

- They will seek greater participation in making global strategy, yet will be reluctant to provide the corresponding wherewithal.

As for the broader context of foreign policy, Europeans will continue to claim that the United States is powerful enough to determine the main contours of international politics and economics, yet will demand that they be treated as equals.

Problems of Atlantic Cooperation

European governments are quick to point out that unilateral actions and statements by partners on matters of common concern place a severe strain on government relations and give rise to misunderstandings. They are prone to take offense at real or imagined slights or at not being consulted in advance about US policies that affect their interests. They are unanimous in prescribing timely and continuous consultations on broad policy, in order to reach agreement where possible or, at least, to secure a better understanding of differences.

European governments are far less united in their choice of the appropriate institutions for dealing with the diverse issues at hand. Some would favor a de facto directorate of the principal allies; others would insist upon broader forums like the OECD and NATO; most would resist the establishment of a new institution. Even if more intensive consultations reduce Atlantic differences, there would remain divergences over what consultations should accomplish. In fact, some Europeans would seek an unacceptable degree of veto power over US policymaking.

Among European publics, neutralist and anti-American political forces are strengthened by publicity concerning possible limited war in Europe and the prospect of a renewed arms race; by the same token, such forces have been weakened by high-level statements of such themes as:

- Deterrence and arms limitation along with an effective balance of power.

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- Shared values in strengthening democratic institutions and civil liberties.

- Partnership in refining NATO strategy, dealing with extra-European issues, and underpinning the global economy.

More broadly, evidence on government and public opinion in Europe indicates that US policy decisions in areas such as the following have significant impact on the direction and tone of Atlantic relations:

- Where the United States is seen to be serious and flexible in arms control negotiations, the intensity of European fears about nuclear war and US "militancy" tends to lessen.

- Where the United States is seen to be strengthening its overall defense capability, especially on the side of strategic deterrence, the credibility of US guarantees to Europe tends to increase.

- Where the United States is seen to be making progress toward a Middle East settlement or—of less importance—to be concerned with development in the Third World, European governments and publics become more favorably disposed to US initiatives in non-European regions.

- When the United States is on a path of high economic growth and low inflation, the resulting boost to European economic recovery tends to reduce political and security strains as well as economic.

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